

A Doctor for Her People

by Judy Parker
Art by George Sears



Walthill, Nebraska—1900. It is late, but as always a lantern burns in the window of Dr. Susan LaFlesche Picotte's home, lighting the way this time for a young Native American couple seeking help for their sick child.

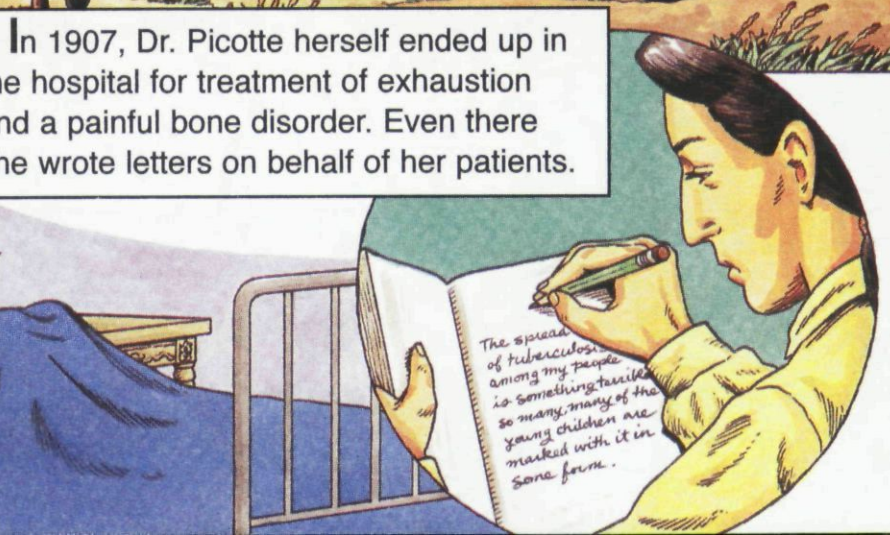
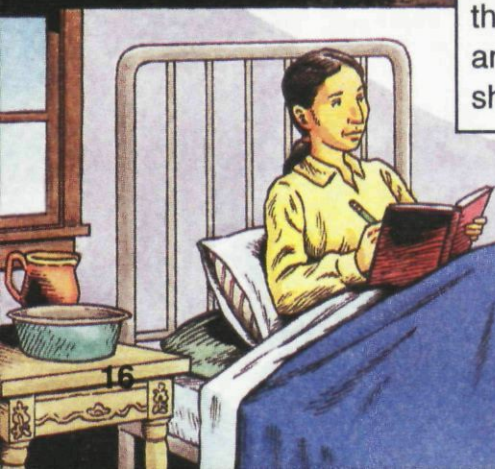



Other doctors could work in the comfort of modern hospitals. But for Dr. Picotte, the first female Native American doctor, the practice of medicine meant a life on horseback, searching out her patients on the windswept Great Plains.




Medical care is scarce for most country people at the turn of the century, even more so for the Indians. It is a comfort to turn to Picotte, the daughter of the last recognized Omaha tribal chief, and a qualified doctor.

In 1907, Dr. Picotte herself ended up in the hospital for treatment of exhaustion and a painful bone disorder. Even there she wrote letters on behalf of her patients.

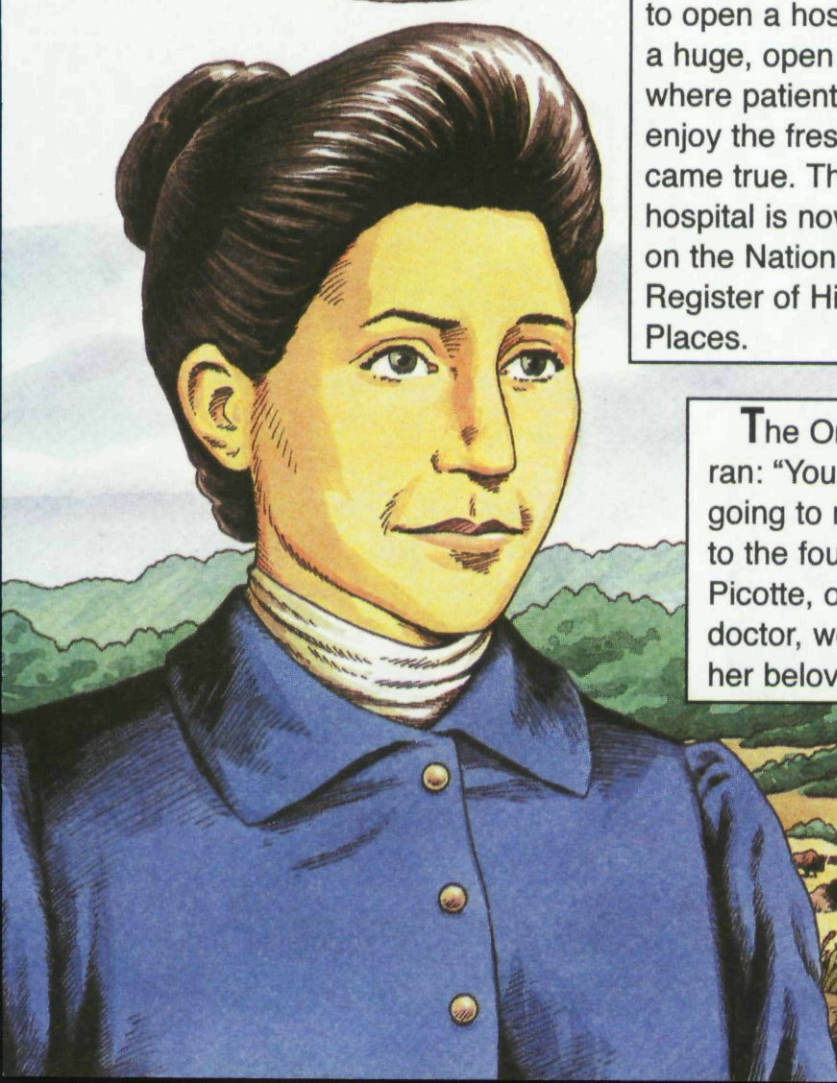




Not only was Susan her people's doctor, she also did their taxes, their wills, solved family problems, and wrote their letters. She won a great victory for her tribe when, in 1910, she helped them gain control of their own property. Before, the government had total say.



Finally, in 1913, Susan's lifelong dream to open a hospital with a huge, open porch where patients could enjoy the fresh air came true. This hospital is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



The Omaha's blessing to a dying person ran: "You are going to the buffaloes. You are going to rejoin your ancestors. You are going to the four winds. Be strong." Susan LaFlesche Picotte, our first Native American woman doctor, would have welcomed this reunion with her beloved people.

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